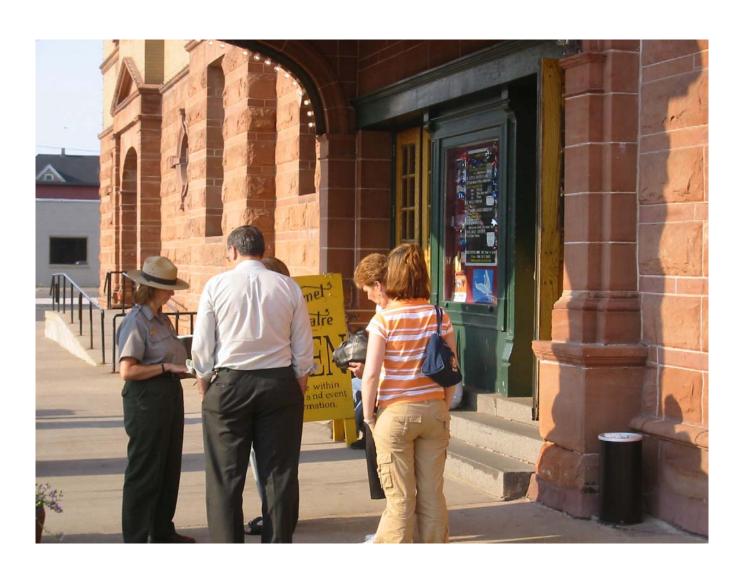**National Park Service**
U.S. Department of the Interior

Social Science Program

Guidelines and Approval Form for Expedited Approval for NPS-Sponsored Public Surveys, Focus Groups and Field Experiments

January 2005

Photo credits: Front cover and page 3, courtesy of Brian Forist, NPS Social Science Program
Page 1 and back cover, courtesy of Margaret Littlejohn, NPS Visitor Services Project

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Introduction

The National Park Service (NPS) sponsors public surveys to provide park managers with information needed for park planning, management, operations and evaluation of performance related to protecting park resources and meeting the needs of the public. In consultation with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Department of the Interior (DOI), the NPS has developed an expedited approval process for NPS-sponsored public surveys. It streamlines the approval process required by the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995. This booklet provides guidelines as of January 2005 for using the expedited process, and a copy of the necessary approval form.

The program of expedited approval applies to NPS-sponsored surveys that collect data from specific segments of the public—*park visitors, potential park visitors, and residents of communities near parks*. The expedited approval is limited to non-controversial surveys that are not likely to attract or include topics of significant public interest in the review process. Definitions of included population segments are listed below:

Park Visitors
Park visitors include those individuals visiting any unit of the National Park System for recreational purposes, to participate in educational activities, to use resources legally available in a given unit, and for non-recreational purposes such as traveling through or making deliveries. For the purpose of this program, the term "visitor" includes the general public, participants in organized tour groups, teachers and students participating in NPS programs or activities, commuters, concession or partner employees, and subsistence resource users.

Potential Park Visitors
Potential park visitors include those individuals who might visit any unit of the National Park System for recreational purposes, to participate in educational activities, to use resources legally available in a given unit, and for non-recreational purposes such as traveling through or making deliveries.

Residents of Communities Near Parks
Residents of communities near parks include those individuals living in gateway communities near any unit of the National Park System, communities within the authorized boundaries of park units and related areas (e.g. National Heritage Areas, National Scenic Trails), inholders, concession or partner employees, and subsistence communities within park boundaries or who traditionally use park resources.

Types of Information Collections Included
The requirements described in this publication apply to any information collection in which the same questions are asked of ten or more people. This includes all forms of surveys (mail, on-site, telephone, Web-based), focus groups and field experiments. Studies in which information is collected about people solely through observation are exempt from the approval process.

Authorities and Guidance

The authorities and guidance that apply to the expedited approval process are:

- Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (P.L. 104-13 May 22, 1995)
- 5 CFR Part 1320: Controlling Paperwork Burdens on the Public; Regulatory Changes Reflecting Recodification of the Paperwork Reduction Act
- United States Code, Title 44, Chapter 25: Coordination of Federal Information Policy
- OMB, The Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995: Implementing Guidance (draft, August 16, 1999)
- DOI Collection of Information from the Public: Interim Guidelines (March 20, 1997)
- NPS Director's Order #78, Social Science, Section III (October 7, 2002)
- NPS, Social Science Surveys and Interviews in the National Parks and for the National Park Service: A Guide to NPS and OMB Approvals (July 2002)
- OMB, Draft Guidance on Designing Surveys for Information Collections: Questions and Answers When Designing Surveys for Information Collections (December 6, 2004)

Within the Scope of the Expedited Approval - Topic Areas

To qualify for the expedited approval, all questions in a survey must fit within one or more of the approved topic areas and must be approved by the NPS and OMB. Researchers have flexibility, within accepted standards of good survey design and OMB regulations, to develop specific questions within the topic areas. The seven topic areas are identified below. A description of the scope of each topic area follows.

Topic Area 1 - Individual Characteristics

Individual characteristics are attributes of individual park visitors or visitor groups, potential visitors or groups, and residents of communities near parks. Some examples include: age, zip code or country of residence, group type and size, ethnicity, race, disabilities/impairments, language abilities, socio-economic status, level of educational attainment, and frequency of visits. Individual characteristics relevant to the mission, management, and/or operations of National Park System units are included in the scope of this topic area.

Topic Area 2 - Trip/Visit Characteristics

Trip/visit characteristics include aspects of travel which affect a trip or decisions which individuals make prior to, during, or following their trip to parks, related areas and nearby communities. Also included are aspects of travel influencing potential visitors to units of the National Park System. Examples include use of overnight accommodations, transportation, trip route, trip origin, trip destination(s), payment of entrance/user fees, ability to obtain tickets, and length of trip. Trip characteristics relevant to the mission, management, and/or operations of National Park System units are included in the scope of this topic area.

Topic Area 3 - Individual Activities and Uses of Park Resources

Individuals participate in many activities during their visits to parks, related areas and nearby communities. Important examples include: sightseeing, visiting visitor centers, day hiking, backpacking, picnicking, camping, shopping, observing wildlife, attending ranger-led programs, taking photographs, boating, fishing, and many others. Individuals use a variety of park or related area resources including natural and cultural resources as well as park infrastructure and visitor services when they visit these areas. Some examples include roads, trails, restrooms, parking lots, drinking water, viewpoints and overlooks, visitor centers, gift shops, stores, and lodges/motels. Depending on the site, individuals may harvest berries, fish, game

animals, firewood, or sea shells; travel cross-country in roadless parts of the park or related areas; travel through historic structures or landscapes; or handle historic objects. Individual activities or uses of natural and cultural resources which are relevant to the mission, management, and/or operations of National Park System units are included in the scope of this topic area.

Topic Area 4 - Individual Expenditures

Individual expenditures include both time and dollar costs that individuals incur visiting parks and surrounding areas. Individual expenditures data include information related to expenditure patterns in the park or surrounding area (direct expenditures) and to expenditures associated with their travels to access the park, nearby community or related areas (indirect expenditures). Contingent valuation questions may be included only if they are limited to goods and services currently or potentially provided by the NPS, cooperating associations, concessioners, and other NPS partners. Contingent valuation questions regarding non-market goods are not allowed. Individual expenditures which are relevant to the mission, management, and/or operations of National Park System units are included in the scope of this topic area.

Topic Area 5 - Individual Evaluation of Park Services

Individual evaluation data include quality and importance ratings of services which individuals used or could have used during a visit to a park or nearby area. Evaluation of services and facilities provided by NPS, concessioners, or other cooperators in the park or nearby area are included in the scope of this topic area.

Topic Area 6 - Individual Perceptions of their Park Experiences

Individual perceptions data include the public's awareness and observations of the natural and social environments in the parks and nearby areas they visit. Included are individual perceptions of the values and benefits of parks and nearby areas, and how public awareness and individual observations influence overall experiences. Individual experiences regarding natural and cultural resources, other visitors, park and other employees, and infrastructure and services in the parks and nearby areas are included in the scope of this topic area.

Topic Area 7 - Individual Opinions on Park Management

Individual opinions about park management include the ideas, beliefs, attitudes, preferences, and values that visitors, potential visitors and residents of communities near parks express regarding all aspects of NPS park management. Included in the scope of this topic area are individual opinions about how the parks manage natural and cultural resources, maintain physical structures, guide human uses of park resources and facilities, and provide educational and other services to the visitors, potential visitors, and residents of communities near parks.

Surveys outside the scope of the expedited approval require clearance through the standard information collection approval process outlined by the Paperwork Reduction Act and its implementing regulations.

Submission and Approval Process

The Principal Investigator (PI) is responsible for initiating a request for expedited approval, and providing a complete and accurate package of approval materials. PIs may include park resource management specialists, NPS interpretive designers, agency scientists, researchers from universities and organizations cooperating with the NPS, among others. The approval package must include:

- (a) a completed expedited approval form,
- (b) a complete copy of the proposed survey instrument, and
- (c) other supporting materials (such as cover letters, introductory scripts and follow-up letters).

The expedited approval form is available in this booklet and online at the following Web site:

http://www.nature.nps.gov/socialscience/docs/ex_guide.pdf

The request for expedited approval and submission of a complete and accurate approval package must be made at least 45 calendar days prior to the first day the PI wishes to administer the survey instrument to the public.

The NPS will provide an administrative and technical review of the submitted materials and notify the PI of the results. If revisions are necessary, the PI should complete them as soon as possible, so that the NPS can forward materials to OMB in a timely fashion. If no revisions are necessary, the NPS will promptly submit the approval package to OMB for final action. A description of the steps in the expedited approval process follows.

Step 1
The PI completes the Expedited Approval Form and prepares the proposed survey instrument. Instructions are provided for each item on the form (see page 6). In addition, the proposed survey instrument must have each question clearly identified as to the topic area under which it is being submitted. Please list topic areas by number and title; for example "Topic Area 4–Individual Expenditures."

Step 2
The PI submits the completed form and a copy of the proposed survey instrument to the NPS Social Science Program for review. The submission package must include (a) any introductory script used in contacting the public, (b) all cover letters, postcard reminders or follow-up letters to be sent to potential respondents, (c) all survey questions, each question being clearly identified as to the topic area under which it is being submitted (topic area number and title), (d) necessary Paperwork Reduction Act compliance language inserted into the survey instrument[1], and (e) any other supporting materials. For person-to-person information collections, such as on-site interviews, telephone interviews and focus groups, a short statement describing how the PI intends to communicate PRA compliance information to respondents is required in the description of the survey methodology.

All submission packages must be formatted as MS Word documents (any recent version up to and including MS Word XP) and sent via email to the NPS Social Science Program at the following address:

brian_forist@partner.nps.gov

Step 3
The NPS Social Science Program staff conducts an administrative and technical review of the submission. The staff recommends (a) approval, (b) revision, (c) resubmission under the Standard Paperwork Reduction Act approval process, or (d) rejection of the proposed survey. The

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[1] Samples of Paperwork Reduction Act compliance language can be found on the NPS Social Science Web site at http://www.nature.nps.gov/socialscience/survey.htm.

NPS Visiting Chief Social Scientist makes a decision based on the staff recommendation and the PI is promptly notified. Should a submission be rejected, the PI may submit an appeal, in writing, to the Associate Director, Natural Resource Stewardship and Science, for a final decision.

Step 4

If approved by the NPS, the NPS Social Science Program staff transmits the submission to OMB for final approval.

Step 5

OMB reviews the submission and notifies the NPS of approval or necessary revisions.

Step 6

If approved by OMB, the NPS Social Science Program staff notifies the PI immediately and assigns an OMB number, a unique NPS identification number, and an expiration date (not to exceed three years or the expiration date OMB has assigned to the program of surveys, whichever comes sooner). The standard expiration date applied to expedited approvals is six months after the survey dates listed on the approval form (item 6). Should OMB require any special conditions to the approval, the PI will be informed and the conditions must be met for approval.

Should OMB have specific questions about the survey instrument or proposed methodology, the NPS Social Science Program staff will immediately inform the PI and work with the PI to make necessary revisions if appropriate. The NPS Social Science Program staff will submit the PI's revisions to OMB and inform the PI of the results.

Step 7

The PI prepares a final revised survey instrument, submitting an archive copy to the NPS Social Science Program.

The final survey instrument must include the following: (a) the OMB number, (b) the unique NPS identification number, (c) the expiration date, and (d) the Paperwork Reduction Act compliance statement.

Additions or changes to a survey instrument after it has been approved, even within the specific topic areas, are not allowed by OMB. An exception is that questions may be deleted after approval by OMB, if necessary.

In addition, the PI must provide the NPS Social Science Program with an archive copy of the final report describing the results of the survey.

All archive copies of reports will be cataloged into the Social Science Studies Collection, physically housed in the NPS Washington Office. Reports housed in the Social Science Studies Collection will also be made available electronically to park managers and the public through the NPS Focus Digital Library and Research Station.

In addition to OMB approval, PIs conducting surveys within units of the National Park System must meet requirements of the National Park Service Research Permit and Reporting System. Research permits under this system are issued by the specific park unit(s) in which the research takes place. Parks may have additional requirements as well. PIs should contact staff members of respective park sites to make this determination. Information on the NPS Research Permit and Reporting System is available online at the following Web site:

http://science.nature.nps.gov/research

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Is approval required for information collected in focus groups or field experiments?
Information collected in focus groups or field experiments must be approved if the total participation includes ten or more persons, and they are asked identical questions.

2. I am a graduate student conducting a study of national park visitors. Do I need approval for my study?
NPS and OMB approval is required if the study is conducted, sponsored, or funded by the NPS. If you are receiving financial or in-kind support from the NPS, approval will be required. The submission should list your major professor or faculty advisor as the PI.

3. I intend to study visitor response to interpretive exhibits. I will observe visitors' behavior as they approach, read, and interact with the exhibits under different experimental conditions. Will I need approval?
Observations are exempt from the approval process if no information is solicited from the public. Also exempt would be questions asked of the person that are specific to that individual or result from observation. Approval is needed if standardized questions will be asked of those observed.

4. How long does the expedited approval process take?
The request for expedited approval, and submission of a complete and accurate approval package, must be made at least 45 calendar days prior to the first day the PI wishes to administer the survey instrument to the public. The expedited approval process applies to studies of park visitors (including subsistence users), potential visitors, and/or residents of communities near parks.

5. How do I provide Paperwork Reduction Act compliance information to the respondents of my survey?
Respondents to NPS-sponsored surveys must be informed that the information collection is approved and in compliance with the Paperwork Reduction Act. Depending on the type of survey instrument used, compliance information is passed along to the respondents in different ways. The compliance information can be printed on an on-site or mail-back questionnaire. General compliance information can be presented verbally in face-to-face interviews, focus groups, or telephone surveys. Additional information will need to be made available to respondents upon request. Sample compliance information appropriate to different situations can be found on the NPS Social Science Program Web site.

6. I will be surveying small groups of park visitors. Is approval required?
NPS and OMB approval is required if identical questions are asked of ten or more persons.

7. Do I need approval if I am pre-testing a survey for later submission?
Pre-testing of survey instruments and methodology is encouraged. If pre-testing involves collecting the same information from ten or more members of the public, clearance for the pre-test is required. The request for approval of the pre-test can be submitted separately or with the final survey package, whichever is appropriate.

8. I intend to offer respondents to my survey a small token of thanks from the park cooperating association. Is this acceptable?
Generally, OMB discourages use of incentives in federal surveys. Under certain circumstances, non-monetary incentives can be used. You should contact the NPS Social Science Program staff to discuss your proposed use of an incentive in your survey.

9. Are there any restrictions on the use of Web surveys?
Use of Web surveys as an option for respondents is acceptable. The Web should not be the only method of survey administration. There are restrictions on surveys of Web site users. If you intend to do a survey of this population please contact the NPS Social Science Program early in your planning process.

Expedited Approval Form Instructions

1. Insert a title for the proposed study and include park name, if appropriate (e.g., Keweenaw National Historical Park Visitor Study). Include the date of submission of the approval request to NPS.

2. Summarize the proposed study with an abstract not to exceed 150 words.

3. Fill in the PI contact information. The NPS Social Science Program will communicate with the PI listed here throughout the entire approval process. For studies in which graduate students are taking an active role, please list the faculty advisor as the PI.

4. Fill in the park or program liaison contact information. List only one park liaison for the purposes of the approval process, even if a PI is conducting a multi-park study.

5. List the park(s) in which the data collection will be conducted or the park(s) for which the data is being collected.

6. List the time period in which the survey will be conducted, including specific starting and ending dates. The starting date should be at least *45* days after the submission date.

7. Check the type(s) of information collection instrument(s) that will be used. If other, please explain.

8. Provide a brief justification for the study, its purpose, goals, need for specific information, and utility to managers. NPS Social Science Program staff can provide assistance as needed.

9. Provide a description of the survey methodology. This description must be specific and include **each** of the following: (a) the respondent universe, (b) the sampling plan and all sampling procedures, including how individual respondents will be selected, (c) how the instrument will be administered, (d) expected response rate and confidence levels, and (e) strategies for dealing with potential non-response bias. A description of any pre-testing and peer review of the methods and/or instrument is highly recommended.

10. Fill in the total number of initial contacts and the total number of expected respondents.

11. Fill in the estimated time to complete the initial contact and the survey instrument (in minutes).

12. Fill in the total number of burden hours. Burden hours refer specifically to interaction with the sample population including initial contact, reviewing instructions, and filling out a survey. Burden on non-respondents (such as initial contact interviews with individuals declining to participate) should be included in this total.

13. Provide a brief description of the reporting plan for the data being collected. This might include a final technical report to the park, a briefing for park managers, a *Park Science* article, a peer-reviewed journal article, etc. A copy of all survey reports must be archived with the NPS Social Science Program for inclusion in the Social Science Studies Collection. Please note this in the reporting plan.

Expedited Approval for NPS-Sponsored Public Surveys

1. **Project Title | Submission Date:**

2. **Abstract:**

   (not to exceed 150 words)

3. ## Principal Investigator Contact Information

   First Name: **Last Name:**

   Title:

   Affiliation:

   Street Address:

   City: **State:** **Zip code:**

   Phone: **Fax:**

   Email:

4. ## Park or Program Liaison Contact Information

   First Name: **Last Name:**

   Title:

   Park:

   Park Office/Division:

   Street Address:

   City: **State:** **Zip code:**

   Phone: **Fax:**

   Email:

Project Information

5. **Park(s) For Which Research is to be Conducted:**

6. **Survey Dates:** _____ (mm/dd/yyyy)   to   _____ (mm/dd/yyyy)

7. **Type of Information Collection Instrument (Check ALL that Apply)**

   ❑ **Mail-Back Questionnaire**   ❑ **On-Site Questionnaire**   ❑ **Face-to-Face Interview**   ❑ **Telephone Survey**   ❑ **Focus Groups**

   ❑ **Other (explain)** _____

8. **Survey Justification: (Use as much space as needed; if necessary include additional explanation on a separate page.)**

9. **Survey Methodology: (Use as much space as needed; if necessary include additional explanation on a separate page.)**

   (a) Respondent universe:

   (b) Sampling plan/procedures:

   (c) Instrument administration:

   (d) Expected response rate/confidence levels:

   (e) Strategies for dealing with potential non-response bias:

   (f) Description of any pre-testing and peer review of the methods and/or instrument (recommended):

10. **Total Number of Initial Contacts | Expected Respondents:**

11. **Estimated Time to Complete Initial Contact | Instrument (mins.):**

12. **Total Burden Hours:**

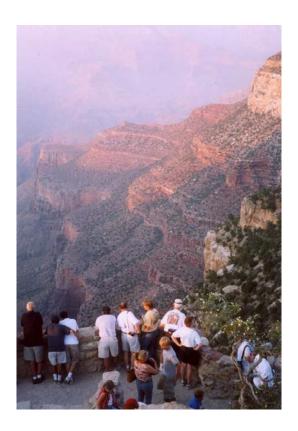13. **Reporting Plan:**

Checklist for Submitting a Request for Expedited Approval

☐   Survey population includes *only* park visitors, potential park visitors and/or residents of communities near parks.

☐   *All* questions in the survey instruments are within the scope of the topic areas covered by the expedited approval.

☐   The expedited approval package is being submitted to the NPS Social Science Program at least *45* days prior to the first day the PI wishes to administer the survey to the public.

The expedited approval package includes:

☐   a completed expedited approval form

☐   a copy of the survey instrument (with *each* question in the survey instrument clearly identified as to the topic area(s) under which it is being submitted)

☐   other supporting materials, such as

        ☐   cover letters to accompany mail-back questionnaires

        ☐   introductory scripts for initial contact of respondents

        ☐   necessary Paperwork Reduction Act compliance language

        ☐   follow-up letters/reminders sent to respondents

The survey methodology presented on the expedited approval form includes a specific description of:

☐   (a) the respondent universe

☐   (b) the sampling plan and all sampling procedures, including how respondents will be selected

☐   (c) how the instrument will be administered

☐   (d) expected response rate and confidence levels

☐   (e) strategies for dealing with potential non-response bias

☐   (f) a description of any pre-testing and peer review of the methods and/or the instrument is highly recommended.

☐   The burden hours reported on the expedited approval form include the number of burden hours associated with the initial contact of all individuals in the sample (i.e., including refusals), if applicable, and the burden associated with individuals expected to complete the survey instrument.

☐   The package is properly formatted and sent to the NPS Social Science Program.

All submission packages must be formatted as MS Word documents (any recent version up to and including MS Word XP) and sent via email to the NPS Social Science Program at the following address:

brian_forist@partner.nps.gov

Mission Statement
The objectives of the NPS Social Science Program are to conduct
and promote state-of-the-art social science related to the mission
of the National Park Service and deliver usable knowledge to
NPS managers and to the public.

For additional information, contact:

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1849 C Street, NW (2300)
Washington, DC 20240
tel: 202.513.7190
fax: 202.371.2131
http://www.nature.nps.gov/socialscience